

✓ Redistricting tough nut to crack

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BATON ROUGE — After looking at Census numbers showing a major shift in the state population, members of a House committee charged with drawing new election district lines came away with the same opinion — it won't be an easy task.

"There could be no district that remains untouched by redistricting," said House and Governmental Affairs Committee analyst Patricia Lowrey-Dufour. "Y'all have a tremendous task ahead of you drawing districts that comply with the law."

The ideal population for a House district in this redistricting effort is 43,174.

Because of the population shift, the extremes of malapportionment show District 99 in New Orleans

with 16,425 residents — 26,749 fewer than the ideal — and District 59 in Ascension Parish with 65,343 residents — 22,369 more than the ideal.

Rep. Nancy Landry, R-Lafayette, said the numbers in Lafayette Parish show enough growth that it should pick up additional representation, but she can't say for sure until the lines are drawn.

"Everybody wants to have lines drawn that give them more representation," said Landry, a member of the House redistricting committee. "We'd like to see Lafayette and Acadiana have more of a voice in Baton Rouge."

The major growth areas of the state — Lafayette, Baton Rouge and the Northshore area above Lake Pontchartrain — are all expected to pick up seats. Because of the Hurricane Katrina evacuation, the New Orleans region is the biggest

REDISTRICTING 'ROAD SHOW'

The "road show" will stop in Monroe at 10 a.m. March 1 at the Monroe Civic Center, Bayou Room, 401 Lea Joyner Memorial Expressway.

population loser.

Landry said her serving on the committee, along with Rep. Taylor Barras, D-New Iberia, puts Acadiana in a good position to make its case for more representation.

"As we have learned, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu," she said. "We're going to be scraping and fighting for our area. I certainly hope Lafayette comes out on the good end, but I can't make

any promises."

Barras said a lot will depend on what happens in the parishes that border Acadiana, where there have been some population losses.

"If we could draw just Acadiana, we could accomplish it, but we have to deal with the other parishes," he said. "It's like an accordion. Whether you start at the boot and work up or start in Shreveport and work down, the accordion effect is the same."

Rep. Herbert Dixon, D-Alexandria, said he believes central Louisiana will fare well, but "the key to the whole process is what I call 'the big bubble' — Lafayette, Ascension, Baton Rouge and St. Tammany — the areas with the biggest growth."

Like Landry and Barras, Dixon said he's looking forward to the committee's "road show" in which it will travel the state soliciting input

from citizens.

"I'm sure we'll get an earful of their desires," he said.

Committee Chairman Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, encouraged those interested in attending the meetings to consult the Legislature's website (www.legis.state.la.us) and examine all the redistricting information available for each region of the state. He said the committee "won't travel with a ton of paper."

The committee also is drawing districts for the Public Service Commission, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Supreme Court and Congress.

Gallot cautioned members, "If you haven't heard from your congressman yet, I suggest you will. Try not to commit until you have the full picture before you."

He added that waiting could avoid an embarrassing situation.